

THE BUSINESS LAW SECTION: LEADING THE TECHNOLOGY CHARGE INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

DANIEL L. APPELMAN AND SUSAN ORLOFF¹

In the past few years, the Business Law Section (“BLS”) of the State Bar has developed new online tools and resources for California business lawyers and improved many old ones. These electronic tools enable the BLS and its standing committees to communicate more effectively with you and to serve you better with up-to-date information. The result is that you now have more access than ever before to information that is important to your practice. Such information includes legislative and regulatory updates, analyses of recent legal developments, and online conferences and seminars, and it enables the BLS and its standing committees to make much-needed information available in all areas of business law practice.

Some of the BLS’ online resources are available only to section members, but much of it is available to everyone. If you haven’t yet joined the BLS, fill out the Section Enrollment Form that is available on the BLS Web site (www.calbar.ca.gov/buslaw). If you haven’t yet established a State Bar Online Profile, you can do so by clicking “Members Only” on the left side of the BLS’s home page. The State Bar Online Profile enables you to enter the “Members Only” areas of the BLS and its standing committees, obtain information and materials available only to section members, and participate in online discussion boards.

Standing Committee Web sites.

The BLS is composed of 15 standing committees, each of which focuses on a different area of business law. The first place to go to get information about your area of practice is the BLS “home page” (www.calbar.ca.gov/buslaw). The 15 BLS standing committees are listed on the right side of that page. Each standing committee has its own web page. The name of each committee provides a link to the web pages for that area of law and your gateway to plenty of information relevant to your practice.

The format of the BLS standing committee web pages has recently been standardized, and the information posted on those web pages is easier to access than ever before. Typically, the home page of each committee will contain late-breaking news of major significance to legal practitioners in that area and descriptions of the most recent activities of the committee. On the left side of each standing committee’s web page are other categories of information relevant to that area of law and that standing committee, including legislative tracking, educational programs, and case summaries. There are also links to the committee’s meeting schedule, minutes of past meetings, and a roster containing the contact information of the standing committee’s officers and other members. The BLS web staff is now able to implement change requests on a weekly basis, so the information there is likely to be more current and up-to-date than ever before.

Many standing committees have open meetings that you can attend either in person or by telephone conference. You can get particulars about how to participate from the committee Chair listed on the standing committee’s roster.

The Business Law Section Home Page.

The BLS hosts a general home page that also contains valuable information for California business lawyers. In addition to providing the links to the web pages of the BLS standing committees, the BLS home page provides electronic access to current and past issues of Business Law News and also to many other BLS publications. These are only accessible to members of the BLS who have completed their State Bar Online Profiles.

The BLS now has password protected areas on its Web site which BLS members can access through their State Bar Online Profiles. These members-only areas contain additional content for business lawyers—another good reason to join the BLS.

Electronic Communications (“E-Bulletins”).

Each BLS standing committee has a distribution list that contains the email addresses of those Section members who have expressed an interest in receiving updates, notices, and materials of interest in that particular practice area. If you are a BLS member, you can sign up to be on any or ALL of these lists through your State Bar Online Profile. Through their Online Profiles, members can also designate which email address they would like to have these notices sent to. If you are not a BLS member, you can contact the chairs of the standing



DANIEL APPELMAN
MR. APPELMAN IS A PARTNER
IN THE SILICON VALLEY
OFFICE OF HELLER EHRMAN
LLP. HE IS A MEMBER OF THE
BUSINESS LAW SECTION’S
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND
WAS FORMERLY CHAIR OF THE
BLS’ STANDING COMMITTEE
ON CYBERSPACE LAW ISSUES.

committees from whom you'd like to get updates, and the chairs can in turn add you to their lists. These electronic bulletins are very specific to the practice areas that correspond to the respective standing committees (such as franchise law, insolvency law, consumer financial services, insurance law, agri-business, etc.).

In addition to the specific updates sent out by the standing committees, the BLS also sends out a monthly bulletin of general interest to all Section members. This e-bulletin (the "BLS E-News") is sent out on the last day of each month. In each edition, the first section highlights three particular matters of interest that have been generated by various standing committees during that month. In the second section, the e-bulletin provides updates on Section activities, notices about important new publications that the Section has developed, and information about online courses.

Periodically, when a hot topic of general interest arises during the course of a month, the BLS will also send an e-bulletin to the entire membership, often with links to documents that have recently been made available on its Web site.

Electronic CLE.

The BLS has made tremendous strides in the area of online education. Once a month, on average, a Section committee will produce a "teleseminar" (a call-in telephonic CLE platform in which both speakers and participants are on the phone) or a "webinar" (a call-in platform that is enhanced with the addition of a visual web component; in this format, participants call in but also log on to a specific Web site where the visual presentation is made). For both teleseminars and webinars, participatory CLE credit is provided.

The Section also has the capability of producing "webcasts." In this format, a live conference takes place in a specific location. Live video feed is then broadcasted to participants who wish to attend the conference via their personal computers rather than attending in person.

When BLS teleseminars, webinars, and webcasts take place, they are automatically taped and then made available online through the State Bar's Web site. You can review a complete catalog of Section electronic courses at www.legalspan.com/calbar/catalog.asp. Once you purchase and download an online program, you have up to three full months to complete the course and can do so at your leisure.

One of the latest electronic CLE offerings has been entitled "CLE-to-Go" and is also available on the State Bar's Web site at the URL reference above. CLE-to-Go seminars are downloadable audio files you can listen to on your portable MP3 player or on

your computer. Once you purchase the CLE-to-Go seminar, you can access it immediately or you can download it at any time by simply logging into your CLE account. The materials are stored in your account (in pdf format) and can be saved on your computer or printed.

Electronic Commerce.

All BLS members can now both register and pay for the conferences and courses that the BLS offers online through the BLS Web site. In addition, the BLS has been a leader in implementing an online "Section Bookstore" where a complete list of current BLS publications can be viewed and purchases can be made. (Those who wish not to order online are provided with the option of downloading a Publication Order Form which they can then print out and mail in with payment by check or credit card.) Very soon, the BLS will also allow State Bar members to join the BLS online in a similar manner.

Discussion Boards.

BLS members can access an online discussion area through their State Bar Online Profiles, and the Section's standing committees can begin and then "host" discussion threads in this area. These discussion boards are similar to blogs and are accessible to all members of the BLS, but not non-section members.

As an individual member, you can also go to this area via your State Bar Online Profile and initiate a discussion thread, post a question, or generally just view comments being posted by fellow BLS members. The BLS encourages you to contact a standing committee chair if you have a topic that you feel would be of interest to that committee's constituency. The chair can then initiate the discussion thread and send out a notice (via email) to his or her constituents, directing them to go to the discussion area to participate.

The Business Law Section is constantly striving to improve the services it offers to its members and to California business lawyers generally. The BLS Executive Committee recognizes that online services offer a variety of ways to do this. We will continue to innovate and use technology to deliver useful information to our constituency. We would appreciate your ideas about how we may serve you even better. If you have suggestions about how we can use the Internet to communicate more effectively, please email the BLS Section Coordinator Susan Orloff at susan.orloff@calbar.ca.gov. ■

¹ Susan Orloff is the Section Administrator of the State Bar of California.